Statesmen, Soldiers and Affairs

MODERN ENGLISH STATESMEN. By G. R. Sterling Taylor. Robert McBride & Co.

THE adjective Modern at first seems a misnomer in Mr. Taylor's chapters on English statesmen. The reader expects muck-raking of personalities still upon the field of history. None of the subjects of the book is now alive. Mr. Taylor starts with Oliver Cromwell and ends up with Disraeli. However, his own attitude is modern. He scouts general opinions. He upholds the point of view of Belloc in a style which resembles Chesterton's.

The introductory chapter gives the keynote of the work. He says: "If one gets away from the popular notion of the orthodox history books that statesmen have been the chief driving force in our national life; if one can regard the whole scene of history with an unprejudiced eye then Kings and Governors will still take a real and permanent place in the picture—but will stand as mere figures in a landscape, as it were, with mountains and rivers of national traditions far bigger than themselves. English history will be seen to be the story of a race and not a national portrait gallery. It would not be too extreme a statement to say that statesmen are only the trivial side of history. It would be almost possible to write an intelligible account of the development of England without mentioning personal names, except at very occasional moments.

Mr. Taylor takes a very unflattering view of Oliver Cromwell. He shows that he was fully as autocratic as Strafford. He says: "The main points in dispute can be summed up in the wide generalization that Charles and Cromwell fought to decide whether England should be governed by a monarch or by a middle class." He shows that Cromwell was essentially the champion of the trader. His summary is as follows: "The orthodox tradition of Oliver Cromwell falls to pieces immediately it is collated with the facts. They leave us a fine soldier, an honest religious enthusiast, a man of broad common sense, withal dangerously near the border line of the insane, and at least a gorgeous dramatic figure for a play. But those who demand great statesmanship in a man who posed as a statesman, those who think that a national leader must do more than overcome the opposition of a battlefield, those who hold that the work of a great politician must be able to stand the test of centuries and not merely of a decade; all these will find Cromwell of secondary importance. He did succeed in influencing the history of the succeeding centuries, but it is open to serious criticism whether all that was permanent in his statesmanship was not primarily wrong."

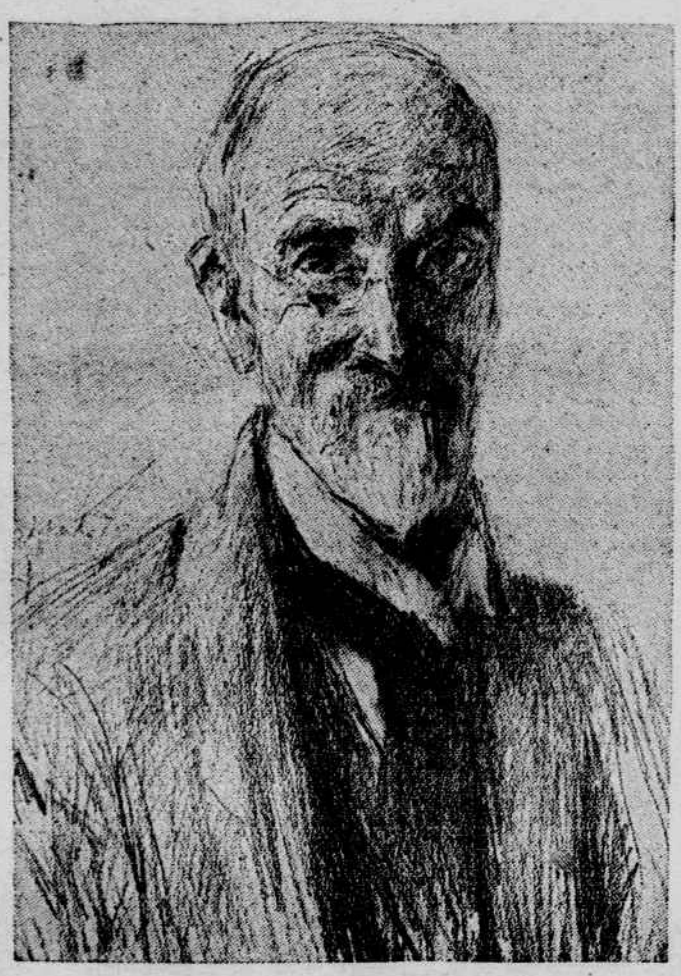
For Robert Walpole Mr. Taylor has nothing but praise. He considers him a well balanced man, unusually honest and efficient. He finds that Horace Walpole helps to interpret his father. His character is in marked contrast with the younger Pitt. In his personal life Robert was free from hypocrisy.

Mr. Taylor's account of the Pitts is very jaundiced. To him they stand for the extension of modern industrialism, which he hates. He gloats over the signs of neurosis which appear in the Pitt family history. His portrait is a masterpiece of vituperation.

Edmund Burke does not receive gentler treatment. The author does not grant him any claims to be considered a liberal or a man of broad vision. He sees a clew to Burke in his book, the "Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful," and points to the importance of fear and horror in Burke's philosophy. He shows that Burke's impeachment of Warren Hastings was a fizzle and that his attitude toward America was determined by the interests of the trading classes. Burke's fear of the French Revolution became an obsession, and he thundered so loudly that he won his point. He summarizes Burke by saying: "He began with much talk of freedom and he ended by being the mouthpiece of every tyrannical instrument in Europe. He began with the sublime and the beautiful and it appeared that his ideal was the figure of a narrow minded Queen and the symbols of a narrow social caste. Burke began as a philosopher and he finished as something not very far from a snob. He was honest and less self-seeking than is usual among ambitious men, but his life work was wrecked because his intellect was always at the mercy of his emotions."

Mr. Taylor is a firm admirer of Benjamin Disraeli and he judges him primarily by his novels. He believes that they interpret the history of England better than any other works, because of his detachment as an Oriental. Mr. Taylor is struck by the duality of Disraeli's character. Of the political Disraeli he says: "Half his life this Disraeli was regarded as something between a charlatan and a mountebank, and during the rest of his career he was the most trusted friend and servant of our primmest Queen, and all Europe was listening for his next words of wisdom." He personifies the other side of his hero's character. He says: "This distantly related Disraeli was a dreamer, who kept himself to himself because he had the timid manners of all people who are of delicate tastes. It is said that it was difficult to make this Disraeli talk; which was not unnatural, for he lived in a far away world of fancies, which could scarcely be translated into words. He was a mystic and regarded ordinary human beings as dull utilitarians who bored him when they did not disgust him. Unlike his political relative, who spent his whole life (almost without time to eat or sleep) at the houses of Parliament, this poetical Disraeli was an idler and a flirt, who thought there was nothing in this world so delightful as a charming woman in her most bewitching mood. This mystical creature of imagination when he would condescend to come to earth and treat of mortals liked most of all to land in the romantic East, where things do not happen in the humdrum way of Paris and London."

This account of Disraeli is more like an excerpt from the "Arabian Nights" than from a critical modern historian.



THE LATE JOHN BUTLER YEATS.

An interesting personality, one of the last of the Bohemians, passed with the recent death in New York city of John Butler Yeats, painter and essayist, and father of William Butler Yeats, the Irish poet. A native of Ulster, Mr. Yeats was a friend of Samuel Butler, the author of "The Way of All Flesh," William Morris and Edward Dowden. For many years he was a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

WHY LINCOLN LAUGHED. By Russell H. Conwell. Harper & Brothers.

DR. CONWELL has a wide fame as a lecturer, and naturally enough he has kept his Lincoln recollections all these years for platform use. But he does well to leave them no longer unpublished. With all the civil war books and articles now in print this little volume is by no means superfluous. It adds measurably to the stock of essential knowledge.

There is full report of several conversations with the President late in the war. But no less important is the story of that New York address, which undoubtedly had much to do with Lincoln's nomination and election.

Young Conwell and his brother heard the Cooper Union speech. They knew nothing about the orator, and went only because tickets had been given them. As they approached the hall a crowd of rough fellows thrust onions in their hands, with these instructions:

"Keep 'em under your jacket and when yer hear the five whistles throw them at the feller speakin'."

This meeting has often been described, but Dr. Conwell is probably the first to tell in print some of the following details:

"One singular proof of Lincoln's nervousness was in the fact that he had forgotten to take from the top of his ear a long black lead pencil, which occasionally threatened to shoot out at the audience. When I mentioned the pencil to Lincoln nearly five years later he said his absent mindedness on that occasion recalled to him the story of an old Englishman who was so absent minded that when he went to bed he put his clothes carefully into the bed and threw himself over the back of his chair."

According to Dr. Conwell Lincoln dropped a leaf of his manuscript and instead of recovering it stepped forward and spoke to the people out of his heart. This extemporaneous portion of his address, which produced an overwhelming effect upon the audience, was not reported. But two of the Ohio delegates who changed their votes to Lincoln at Chicago were there and expressed afterward their confidence in "Old Abe."

"Charles Sumner said in one of his great speeches in Faneuil Hall, Boston, that if the speech Lincoln carefully wrote had not been circulated or if he had actually delivered the speech which he wrote the change of direction in the car of progress would have led to delays and disasters 'out beyond the limits of human calculations.'"

Young Conwell became a Captain in the army and visited Washington toward the end of the war to ask a pardon for one of his soldiers. No argument was needed, for the President had already decided the case.

"'You can go back to the Ebbitt House now,' said Lincoln, 'and write to that soldier's mother in Vermont and tell her the President told you that he never did sign an order to shoot a boy under 20 years of age and that he never will!'"

Then he relaxed and talked freely on many topics. Later Conwell had a second interview. Here are some of the best paragraphs in his report of these talks:

"He told me what seemed a good point to remember, that he had trained his memory in his youth by determining to remember people's faces and names together. This he had done when he was first elected to the Legislature in Illinois. He realized at once when he got into the Legislature that he could not make a speech like the rest of 'those fellows,' college people, but he could get a personal acquaintance and great influence if he would remember everybody's face and everybody's name; and so he said he had acted upon the plan of carrying a memorandum book around with him and setting down carefully the name of each man he met, and then making a little outline sketch with his pencil of some feature of the man—his ears, nose, shoulder or something which would help him to remember." . . .

"One day when I was at the White House in conversation with Lincoln a man bustled in self-importantly and whispered something to him. As the man left the room Lincoln turned to me and smiled.

"'He tells me that 12,000 of Lee's soldiers have just been captured,' Lincoln said. 'But that doesn't mean anything; he's the biggest liar in Washington. You can't believe a word he says. He reminds me of an old fisherman I used to know who got such a reputation for stretching the truth that he bought a pair of scales and insisted on weighing every fish in the presence of witnesses.

"'One day a baby was born next door and the doctor borrowed the fisherman's scales to weigh the baby. It weighed forty-seven pounds.'"

The serious view Lincoln took of humor's place in life and the value he placed on the humorist is emphasized in his tributes to Artemus Ward. The conversation turned on the man's status as a traveling 'showman' or comic entertainer. Said Lincoln:

"'I have agreed with many people who think that Ward should be in some trade or writing books. But I don't know about it. He has a special kind of mind, and rightly used he would make an excellent teacher of mental science. In one way of looking at it his life is wasted. But if he refreshes and cheers other people as he does me I can't see how he could make a better investment of his life. I smile and smile here as one by one the crowd passes me to shake hands until it is a week before my face gets straight. But it is a duty. I could defeat one whole army to-morrow by looking glum at a reception or by refusing to smile for three consecutive hours.'"

THE SOUL AND BODY OF AN ARMY. By Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton. George H. Doran Company.

IT is a perfectly familiar phenomenon that in countries like Great Britain and the United States the mass of the people take little or no interest in their army and navy in times of peace. From the viewpoint of those interested in that out of date thing called "national preparedness" this is very regrettable. But no one yet has ever found a corrective for this fault in the British and American peoples.

Yet to find a cure for this state of mind is the ambition of most writers on military matters, and more particularly army and navy officers who take their profession seriously. Such a one is Gen. Sir Ian Hamilton, who in his new work entitled "The Soul and Body of an Army," engages himself to try and arouse interest in the question of what kind of an army England ought to have and how England should profit in a military sense from the lessons of the world war. It is a Sisyphus task, yet Sir Ian goes at it with high spirits, good humor and a thousand and one illustrations of what ought to be done. Occasionally, of course, he indulges in strokes of irony. They are the signs of fifty years of service in the army he loves and of his final catastrophe at Gallipoli, a removal from his command that caused him, as he wrote in his "Gallipoli Diary," to think of "cups of hemlock and other antique images."

He shows how the people of England are "Strangers Yet" to the army and its ways in his opening chapter. He takes up and discusses in turn the knowledge of armies, their higher organization, discipline, training, numbers and the various methods of applying these elements to the making of a real army that will be practical and efficient. And he does all this with innumerable illustrations out of his own experiences, using our own Gen. Goethals, as the builder of the Panama Canal, to point one of his morals.

But in spite of all his labor and all his interesting qualities as a writer we are afraid Gen. Hamilton is engaged in a fruitless task. No one but the most enthusiastic student of military affairs, and they are pitifully small in numbers, is likely to take the slightest interest in a book of this kind at the present time so that all his admirable arguments will go for naught. The only possible reward Sir Ian can hope to find for the labor of writing such a book is that when the next war comes around and England begins to muddle through it the glorious mantle of Lord Roberts will be draped around his shoulders and he or his disciples can say, "I told you so."

THE TURKS AND EUROPE. By Gaston Gaillard. London: Thomas Murby & Co.

WE have become so used to hearing the Turk called "unspeakable" and "impossible" and have grown so accustomed to couple the word "atrocities" with his exploits that there is an element of surprise in meeting a somewhat impassioned defense of him from a Western European publicist. M. Gaillard is frankly, emphatically pro-Turkish. He regards the Turk rather as a victim of circumstances than as a sinner, and believes that any solution of the Near Eastern questions should regard him as a desirable factor rather than one to be eliminated. He buttresses his arguments not merely with a flattering analysis of Turkish character but with a long, carefully detailed account of the many intrigues directed against the Turkish Government during the past two centuries by peoples and cliques who aimed to plunder him. He manages to make out something of a case; at least to the extent that the enemies of Turkish rule appear to be responsible for some elements in the present unhappy situation.

The book was first published in French in August, 1920, and is primarily a polemic directed against the unfortunate Sevres treaty. The progress of events since then have rendered M. Gaillard's diatribe a bit out of date, though M. Gaillard might be forgiven for saying "I told you so." He did not foresee the course of the actual breakdown of that arrangement, which went to pieces with the return of Constantine and the downfall of Venizelos, but he did demonstrate that the treaty scheme was doomed to failure. In fact, no serious attempt was made by the Allies to put it into effective operation. Its present result is a continuing war, with the outcome still doubtful.

M. Gaillard argues that French policy should have aimed at the support of the Turk in Europe. French citizens still own a very large part, if not a majority, of the Turkish bonds. Further, he argues, abandoning Turkey meant practically delivering Constantinople to the British. There is to-day an active pro-Turkish element in French politics. M. Gaillard is also severely critical of Lloyd George and the British attitude. He thinks their policy was not merely selfishly grasping but foolishly shortsighted in its failure to realize that unsettling the Mohammedan power in Asia Minor must have a disturbing effect on India. As to that point the state of things to day bears out M. Gaillard's prediction, as even the British politicians now admit.

M. Gaillard assumes a sympathetic attitude toward Mohammedanism. "One cannot forget," says he, "either that Islam acted as a counterpoise to Christianity or that it played an important part in our civilization by securing the continuance and penetration of Eastern and pagan influences." He even tries to apologize for the Armenian massacres and suggests that the Armenians have always harassed the Turks quite as much as the other way round. It suggests the case of the bulldog which was brutally attacked by an 'infuriated rabbit."

Nevertheless, M. Gaillard's analysis, although events have marched beyond his foresight, remains of value, and his two chief conclusions have elements of accuracy in them, in that the dismemberment of Turkey is not turning out to the advantage of England and that France is "gradually losing the moral prestige she once enjoyed in the East." The present situation is sheer chaos, with no one satisfied, and no end of the war in sight. M. Gaillard's philippic may at least serve to show that the Turk's case is not entirely without merit.

THE RIDDLE OF THE TEMPLE. By G. Lenotre. Translated by Frederic Lees. Doubleday, Page & Co.

AFTER reading 378 of the 382 pages that go to make up the latest exposition of the mystery of the disappearance of Louis XVII. one comes across this sentence: "In truth, and although it may be pitiful to conclude so long a narrative with these words: We do not know." This is the net result of a long and repetitious narrative of the imprisonment of the young son of Louis XVI. in the Temple and of his disappearance rather than of his death. The author of this text has taken very great pains to study all the original sources to throw light on this great mystery of history. In fact, his documentation becomes wearisome in the end. And when all is said and done he gives us his own verdict as to its solution in the four words, "we do not know."

Lenotre appears to believe that a boy (about five years older than the Dauphin) was substituted for Louis XVI.'s heir, that it was this substitute who died in the Temple and whose body was buried in the cemetery of Sainte Marguerite. What became of the real Dauphin, spirited away in a basket of soiled linen, according to the story of "the woman Simon," he does not pretend to explain, although he devotes a long chapter to telling the adventures of two of the false Dauphins who agitated certain Royalists in France for a time and the Government also, but to a lesser degree. One can admire the zeal for research and the honesty of Lenotre in confessing the failure of all his labors. But little else remains for praise in a narrative that self-confessedly fails of its object. The English translation is very stiff and does nothing to add to the interest of the work by imparting literary grace or charm to it.